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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 THE HAGUE 000726

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/01/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [NATO](#) [AF](#) [NL](#)

SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS: REACTIONS TO PRESIDENT'S AFGHANISTAN
SPEECH; NEXT STEPS

REF: A. SECSTATE 122731

[1](#)B. THE HAGUE 663

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Classified By: Pol Deputy Eric G. Falls for reasons 1.4(b,d)
[1](#)1. (S/NF) SUMMARY: Dutch Defense Minister van Middelkoop and
the leader of the largest coalition party in parliament told
Ambassador they expected the Government to find a way to stay
in Afghanistan after 2010, albeit with a significantly
reduced presence. Press coverage of the President's address
was broad, with Cabinet members avoiding comment on the Dutch
deployment decision. The Ambassador will see other key
figures in the coming days. The PM's office recommends
against high-profile USG visits at this time, and Post
concurs. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C/NF) DEFENSE MINISTER: Defense Minister Eimert Van
Middelkoop told Ambassador it was important that President
Obama used the term "transition" as a means of explaining the
way forward in Afghanistan, which sent the proper signal to
allies and Afghans. (NOTE: Van Middelkoop is a member of the
Christian Union. The Dutch governing coalition is made up of
the Christian Democrats, Labor, and the Christian Union. END
NOTE.) He said the new U.S. strategy was very much in
alignment with Dutch operational activity in Uruzgan.
Throughout the conversation, van Middelkoop referred to the
Cabinet discussion on Afghanistan as "frustrating" and

alluded to the intransigence of the Labor Party. He indicated they would try to reframe the discussions on transforming the Dutch PRT in Uruzgan as a multi-national PRT, still led by the Dutch and with force protection. Asked about a potential cabinet crisis on the Afghanistan question, Van Middelkoop confirmed that the Labor Party has been very slow to talk about any possibilities in Uruzgan and has not left much room for alternatives. He said the Dutch will not/leave Afghanistan and will commit other resources to the mission. The only open question really is the continuation of a PRT in Uruzgan.

¶3. (C/NF) CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS FLOORLEADER: Pieter van Geel, leader of the largest party in parliament, the Christian Democrats (CDA), told Ambassador he was "convinced" the government coalition would not leave Afghanistan, and would stay "somehow." He assured the Ambassador that PM Balkenende and FM Verhagen continue to support the mission, and that PM Balkenende understands that the Dutch military needs a political decision by Christmas for planning purposes. Van Geel agreed that the Netherlands' leadership position in Europe would be harmed if it failed to contribute to the NATO effort. However, Van Geel said some coalition members in parliament cling to "irrational" views, such as that the government promised to end its Afghanistan deployment after ¶2010. Labor confronts the rational pressure from NGOs to stay on and preserve the gains the Dutch had won in Uruzgan, with the irrational commitment to get out of Uruzgan. Van Geel had hoped that the election of President Obama and his new approach in Afghanistan would sway Labor Party members, but he has been disappointed. Unlike the Christian Democrats, the Labor Party does not have a history of making tough political decisions. Within Dutch society, despite satisfaction with the government, there has been a growing a fear of globalization, skepticism of development aid, and a Qfear of globalization, skepticism of development aid, and a tendency to &hide behind the dikes8 rather than fully engage with the outside world. Asked about helpful efforts to engage the Dutch, Van Geel said General Petraeus's full praise for the Dutch efforts during his September visit was a pleasant surprise -- parliamentarians had expected criticism. He noted that opposition parties were important to developing sufficient support for continued deployment, and therefore Mark Rutte of the Liberal Party (VVD) and Alexander Pechtold of D66 would be important contacts for the USG. The CDA had found it helpful to bring former members of Dutch government to parliament, where they offered less political arguments for staying.

¶4. (SBU) PRESS COVERAGE: The president's speech -- including positive reactions from key Dutch cabinet members -- garnered widespread coverage throughout the country on December 2. It was the lead story on the early morning TV and radio news programs. Although too late to make the morning papers, it was covered thoroughly on the websites of the major dailies, including links to a video and the full text of the speech. The headline of the nation's largest daily, "De Telegraaf," read "Heavy U.S. Pressure on Dutch Government: Stay in THE HAGUE 00000726 002 OF 002 Uruzgan." Various press outlets reported that Secretary Clinton called Foreign Minister Verhagen (a CDA member) last week, asking the Netherlands to "reconsider" its planned troop withdrawal. They also reported that Undersecretary of Defense Flournoy called Defense Minister Van Middelkoop with the same request. Although he declined to speculate on the Cabinet's upcoming decision, FM Verhagen commended the president's speech, adding that "If everyone were to say 'let others take care of this,' Afghanistan would again be a free haven for terrorists in no time. The Netherlands cannot just pass the care for security in Afghanistan to others." Van Middelkoop similarly praised what he called the President's "clear and recognizable vision" for the mission in Afghanistan, including the deadline of July 2011 to begin withdrawing U.S. forces and his call on NATO allies to provide more military troops. Like Verhagen, though, Van Middelkoop stressed that the Dutch government has made no decision about its military contributions after August 1, ¶2010. Labor Party spokesman Martijn van Dam said his party will continue to oppose retaining troops in Uruzgan.

¶5. (S/NF) OTHER REACTIONS:

-- National Security Adviser Karel van Oosterom said that negotiations in coalition are moving "inch by inch" and are delicate. "We are beginning to move Labor." He advised against high-profile U.S. engagement, asserting it would be counterproductive at this time. Dutch NATO PermRep Ambassador Majoor intends to speak soon with Ambassador Daalder. On December 3, the Dutch Chief of Defense, General Van Uhm, will speak with the CJCS Admiral Mullen and SACEUR Admiral Stavridis.

-- The Slovak ambassador to the Netherlands had high praise for the Dutch, telling the Dutch MOD political director during a reception that her nations' troops would be eager to expand their work with the Dutch in Uruzgan.

-- Dutch Ambassador to the United States Jones-Bos told U.S. Ambassador she was willing to help as needed and that she was "working" Transportation Ministers Eurlings (CDA) and State Secretary for European Affairs Timmermans (Labor) to encourage coalition support for a longer-term Uruzgan commitment.

¶6. (S/NF) NEXT STEPS: Post will place an op-ed by Ambassador Daalder, and NATO SYG Rasmussen is also submitting a piece to the Dutch press. Ambassador will see the following key figures in the next few weeks:

-- Dec. 4 -- Development Minister Koenders, a key decision-maker in the Labor Party

-- Dec. 7 -- FM Verhagen and the head of parliament's defense committee, Anouchka van Miltenberg.

-- Dec. 14 -- Opposition party leader Mark Rutte, of the Liberal Party, a possible proponent of the mission.

-- Dec. 15 -- Head of parliament's foreign affairs committee, Henk Jan Ormel.

¶7. (S/NF) COMMENT: The PM's office recommends against high-profile USG visits at this time, and Post concurs. Our central goal is to convince the Netherlands to maintain after 2010 a PRT in Uruzgan with a few hundred troops for force protection. We expect them to withdraw nearly 1500 troops in 2010 while continuing their support with F-16s, enablers, and military and police training. The upcoming meeting with Minister Koenders, just after the Dutch cabinet meets on Friday, will be particularly informative. A U.S. QFriday, will be particularly informative. A U.S. announcement on who will take over Task Force Uruzgan will help us engage the Dutch to sustain their efforts in Afghanistan. END COMMENT.

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